

AGAINST THE BEST

In major sports competitions like the SEA Games, Asian Games, Commonwealth Games and the Olympics, track & field – alongside swimming - enjoys a certain prestige and visibility which other sports often envy. This is perhaps why some of the most recognizable Olympic champions come from track and field. Indeed, the likes of USA's sprinter Jesse Owens, Australia's 400m runner Cathy Freeman and China's 110m hurdler Liu Xiang are household names. At the Asian Games and SEA Games levels, our stars in track & field are well recognized among Singaporeans. For example, even after all these years, sprinter C. Kunalan, middle distance champion Chee Swee Lee and long distance queen K. Jayamani are personalities sports fans are familiar with.

Often, at major meets, fans pay close attention to the performances of our track & field representatives. The sheer drama, excitement and glamour of events like the 100m, 800m and 4x400m relay make athletics the sport which hogs the limelight during competitions like the SEA Games or Asian Games. And purists do argue that gold medals in other sports mean little if we fall too far behind in a major sport like track & field.

Perhaps this is why some of the best moments in Singapore's sporting history come from athletics. So take your little trip down memory lane as we bring you some of the highlights from track & field during major competitions.

REGIONAL FORCE

SEA Games

Bangkok 1959

In the 1959 SEAP Games (now known as SEA Games) held in Bangkok, Singapore did well with a harvest of four golds, 2 silvers and 3 bronzes. Tan Eng Yoon was the undisputed star as he won gold medals in the 400m hurdles and the “hop, step, jump” as well as bronze in the 110m hurdles. A. Pal Singh and Wong Fey Wan shone too with golds in the pole vault and 110m hurdles respectively. M. Gunasena, silver in the 400m hurdles, and Ernest Frida, bronzes in the 100m and 200m, were the other individuals who made their mark. In the 4x100m relay, Ernest teamed up with Cedric Monterio, Chai Ling Fook and Low Sin Chock to clinch the silver.

Rangoon 1961

In the next SEAP Games, held in 1961 in Rangoon, Singapore continued its fine showing with its 3-3-4 haul. The three gold medallists were Wong Fey Yan in the 110m hurdles, Tan Eng Yoon in the hop, step & jump and A. S. Gill in the high jump. Fey Wan also won silver in the 400m hurdles while Eng Yoon clinched a bronze in the 110m hurdles. On their part, Low Sin Chock (100m) and A. Pal Singh (pole vault) earned individual bronzes. Sin Chock and Eng Yoon also teamed up with Benedict Gomes and V. K. Nathan for the 4x100m relay silver. But the breakthrough – in terms of the strides made by Singapore women - came in the medals earned by Evelyn Lee Yuet Yong who won a silver in the long jump and a bronze in the 80m hurdles.

Kuala Lumpur 1965

At the next SEAP Games held in Kuala Lumpur in 1965, Singapore collected four golds, five silvers and five bronzes. Leading the way with the gold medals were Osman Merican in the 110m hurdles, E. Mane in the hammer throw, M. Gunasena in the 400m hurdles and Cheong Wai Hing in the high jump. The silvers came from Parameswaran Pillai in the 5,000m, Wong Fey Wan in the 110m hurdles, Major Singh in the 3,000m steeplechase, the men's 4x100m relay quartet (C. Kunalan, Osman Merican, Natahar Bava, Wong Fey Wan) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Evelyn Tan, Heather Siddons, Chia Lee Meng, Glory Varam). Bronzes were earned by A. Pal Singh in the pole vault, Natahar Bava in the 200m and marathon, Cheong Wai Hing in the pentathlon and the team of Osman Merican, A. Saddayapan, Kenneth Perera and M. Gunasena in the men's 4x400m relay.

Bangkok 1967

At the 1967 SEAP Games in Bangkok, where Singapore walked away with a creditable 5-9-7 haul, the attractive Heather Siddons came into the limelight and made a statement for the ladies with gold in the 80m hurdles. Joining her as gold medallists were Osman Merican (110m hurdles), Mahmood Mansur (pole vault), Ekanth Mane (hammer throw) and Cheong Wai Hing (pentathlon). Wong Fey Wan (110m hurdles), Cheong Wai Hing (80m hurdles), C. Kunalan (100m, 200m), Avtar Singh (1,500m), P. Pillai (5,000m), Mirza N. Namazie (3,000m steeplechase) and Hali Singh (10,000m) earned silvers. The men's 4x100m relay team of C. Kunalan, Yeo Kian Chai, Wong Fey Wan and Nathar Bava also earned a silver. Clinching bronzes were Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Glory Barnabas (100m, 200m), Cheong Wai Hing (high jump) and Mirza N. Namazie (5,000m). The men's 4x400m relay team (Nathar Bava, Gunasela Migale, Ho Mun Cheong, C. Kunalan) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Glory Barnabas, Eng Chiew Guay, Rosalind Chan, Maimoon Bakar) also won bronzes. Significantly, though athletes like Glory Barnabas, Noor Azhar Hamid and C. Kunalan didn't win gold medals here. This was just the beginning of their long association with Singapore athletics – an association which would soon bring them many moments of glory.

Rangoon 1969

In the 1969 SEAP Games in Rangoon, where Singapore recorded a 6-8-7 haul in terms of medals, C. Kunalan emerged as the undisputed star with two individual wins. His times of 10.5 secs and 21.3 secs in the 100m and 200m respectively caught the eyes of fellow athletes and coaches. In addition, he teamed up with Cheah Kim Teck, A. Sadayappan and Ho Mun Cheong to win the 4x400m relay gold. Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), M. Mansoor (pole vault) and Gan Bee Wah (100m hurdles) shone with gold medals. Ho Mun Cheong (400m), Avtar Singh (5,000m), Osman Merican (110m hurdles), Lim Boot Hiang (long jump), Glory Barnabas (100m, 200m), Chee Swee Lee (400m) and the women's 4x100m relay team of Eng Chiew Guay, Madeline Teo, Christine Chung and Glory Barnabas accounted for the silvers. Bronzes went to P. Pillai (5,000m and 3,000m steeplechase), A. Sadayappan (400m hurdles), Arumugam Kannan (50km walk), Lee Tai Jong (800m), Gan Bee Wah (pentathlon) and the 4x100m relay team of Andrew Chee, Aminuddin Kassim, Yeo Kian Chai and C. Kunalan.

Kuala Lumpur 1971

In the 1971 SEAP Games in Kuala Lumpur, P. C. Suppiah and Lim Hong Kang emerged as the new stars of Singapore athletics with golds in the 10,000m and long jump respectively. Apart from these two wins, our athletes also brought home 12 silvers and seven bronzes. Among those who contributed the silvers were Yeo Kian Chai (100m), P. C. Suppiah (5,000m), Francis Sengol (20km walk), Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Lim Boot Hiang (long jump), Leslie Shepherdson (triple jump), Eknath Mane (hammer throw), Lee Tai Jong (800m) and Chua Kim Tee (javelin). Teams for the men's 4x100m relay (Illyas, Aminuddin Kassim, Loh Chan Pew and Yeo Kian Chai), women's 4x100m relay (Eng Chiew Guay, A. Latchemay, Maimoon Bakar and Sheila Fernando) and women's 4x400m relay (Chew Kim Hua, A. Latchemay, Maimoon Bakar and Chee Swee Lee) also won silvers. The bronze medallists were Wong Chong Sai (pole vault), Eng Chiew Guay (100m), Chee Swee Lee (400m), Mirnigar Begum (1,500m), Jeanette Gaffney (200m hurdles), Yeo Kian Chai (200m), and the team of Cheah Kim Teck, Ong Yeok Phee, Ho Mun Cheong and Yeo Kian Chai (4x400m relay)

Singapore 1973

The 1973 SEAP Games held in Singapore marked a breakthrough, with our athletes winning an unprecedented number of medals – 7 golds, 16 silvers and 8 bronzes. The women stole the show, with wins by Heather Merican (100m hurdles, 200m hurdles), Eng Chiew Guay (100m), Glory Barnabas (200m) and the team of Eng Chiew Guay, Glory Barnabas, Gan Bee Wah and Sheila Fernando (4x100m relay). Our men too did their part, with Tang Ngai Kin (decathlon) and Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump) striking gold. In winning medals, athletes like Sergit Singh, P. C. Suppiah, A. Mahalingam and S. A. Kannu did their part to boost middle distance and long distance running in Singapore while R. Nadarajan and S. Dorairaj did well in the walking races. Other athletes who put up a good show included Lim Hong Kang, Wong Chong Sai, Jaw Tee Jang, Eknath Mane, Chee Swee Lee, Mirnigar Begum, Gan Bee Wah, Leow Nam Fang, Goh Li Kian, Koh Hong Phang, Chua Kim Tee, Kok Yin Ping and Jennifer Moss. Relay teams made up of runners like C. Kunalan, Yeo Kian Chai, Ong Yeok Phee, Andrew Chee, Loh Chan Pew, Ho Mun Cheong, Cheah Kim Teck, Godfrey Jalleh, C. Madathi, Chew Kim Hua, Maimoon Azlan and Chee Swee Lee also contributed to the rich harvest. For young Chee Swee Lee in particular, the success of 1973 was just part of a bigger quest. A year later, at the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, she performed admirably on a much bigger stage and was crowned 400m champion.

Bangkok 1975

Repeating the phenomenal success of 1973 on home ground was going to be tough. Even so, our athletes performed well in the next SEAP Games, held in 1975 in Bangkok, reaping 5 golds, 6 silvers and 3 bronzes. Flying the national flag high with golden performances were Cheah Kim Teck (400m), Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Chee Swee Lee (400m, 800m) and Heather Merican (200m hurdles). The silver medals came from Lim Hong Kang (long jump), R. Nadarajan (20km walk), Heather Merican (100m hurdles) as well as from our relay teams. Chew Kim Hua (400m), Lee Tai Jong (1,500m) and Chia Swee Kim (high jump) also shone with bronzes. In all, it was a good meet after the high of 1973. Other athletes who did their part were C. Kunalan, Ong Yeok Phee, Mohd Ilyas Bujai, Yeo Kian Chai, Quah Kim Tiong, Godfrey Jalleh and Low Yock Peng. Again, Chee Swee Lee's performance was the highlight. Her two gold medals affirmed her status as one of the region's best athletes.

Kuala Lumpur 1977

In a relatively quiet outing after the success of 1973 and 1975, Singapore clinched 3 golds, 3 silvers and 5 bronzes at the 1977 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur. Bringing in top honours were Sankaran Gawade (hammer) and K. Jayamani (1,500m, 3,000m). Heather Merican (200m hurdles), Chua Kim Tee (javelin) and the 4x100m relay team brought home the silvers while C. Kunalan (100m), S. Kumaravelu (marathon), R. Nadarajan (10 km walk), R. Maniam (20 km walk) and K. Jayamani (800m) won bronzes.

Jakarta 1979

In yet another difficult outing marked by big improvements on the part of regional rivals, Singapore won 2 golds, 5 silvers and 3 bronzes at the 1979 SEA Games in Jakarta. The 2 golds came from the valiant efforts of K. Jayamani, who triumphed in the 1,500m and 3,000m to establish herself as the rising star of distance running in South East Asia. Winning the silver medals were R. Nadarajan (10km walk, 20km walk), Sankaran Gawade (hammer throw), Hamzah Barik (110m hurdles) and Krishnasamy Chandriga (5km walk) while Chua Kim Tee (javelin), Heather Merican (100m hurdles) and Surendra Subramaniam (1,500m) earned bronzes.

Manila 1981

After the glory of the 70s, an era when talents were well groomed and team spirit high, Singapore's athletes found the going tough. The team returning from the 1981 SEA Games in Manila managed a silver and six bronzes. It was the first time we didn't win a gold medal. Putting in valiant efforts was R. Nadarajan (silver in 20km walk, bronze in 10km walk). The bronze medallists were Noor Azhar Hamid (high jump), Tang Ngai Kin (100m), Margaret Tan (5km walk, 10km walk) and the 4x100m relay team of Ganesan Kasee, Andrew Toh, Tang Ngai Kin and Haron Mundir.

Singapore 1983

In 1983, the SEA Games returned to Singapore. As host country, much was at stake. Some lost pride felt after the 1981 SEA Games in Manila when we didn't win a single gold was salvaged, thanks to the winning performance of K. Jayamani in the women's marathon. Her efforts were all the more appreciated as she was not a specialist in this event. Through sheer will power and the determination to make sure we would not end up without a gold again, she managed to hold off her regional rivals. Apart from this single gold, we also won 2 silvers and 6 bronzes. The silvers came from Haron Mundir (200m) and Margaret Tan (10km walk). Jagtar Singh (10,000m), D. Selvarajoo (3,000m steeplechase), R. Nadarajan (10km walk, 20km walk), Ng Yee Ming (long jump), K. Jayamani (3,000m) and the men's 4x100m relay team of Haron Mundir, Ong Yeok Phee, Alan Koh and Tang Ngai Kin won bronzes.

Bangkok 1985

If a revival was what we were hoping for after the encouraging results of the 1983 SEA Games on home ground, it didn't happen in 1985 when the event was held in Bangkok. In what was easily Singapore's driest outing, only pole vaulters Chan Chin Wah and Ng Kean Mun (bronzes) came home with medals.

Jakarta 1987

The next SEA Games, held in Jakarta in 1987, produced slightly better results for the Singapore track and field team which won five bronzes. Haron Mundir showed promise with bronzes in both the 100m and 200m and teamed up with Hong Jin Sheng, Francis Nathan and Sandy Ang to finish third in the 4x100m relay. The other medallists were James Wong (discuss) and Helen Low (5km walk).

Kuala Lumpur 1989

Haron Mundir continued to hold the fort in the 1989 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur, clinching silver in the 100m and bronze in the 200m for Singapore's only medals in track & field. The gold medal remained elusive since K. Jayamani last won it in the 1983 SEA Games in Singapore.

Manila 1991

Things got even more challenging for Singapore in the 1991 SEA Games in the Philippines as our neighbours improved while we tried to keep up. Only Yu Long Nyu managed a medal – a bronze in the heptathlon.

Singapore 1993

Things improved when the Singapore hosted the SEA Games yet again in 1993. James Wong finally broke a 10-year dry spell in terms of gold medals with his win in the discus. He also clinched a silver in the hammer throw. There were commendable performances too by silver medallists, Hamkah Afik (200m) and Toh So Liang (marathon). Winning bronzes were Tan Kheik Tiong (10km walk), Khoo Ching Mong (20km walk), Helen Low (5km walk, 10km walk), Mok Hay Foo (pole vault), Toh So Liang (10,000m) and Yu Long Nyu (heptathlon). They were joined by the men's 4x100m relay team of Firdhouse H. Saiyat, Mohd Yusof Alias, Hamkah Afik and Mohd Hosni.

Chiangmai 1995

James Wong continued to fly the national flag at the 1995 SEA Games in Chiangmai, winning gold in the discus and silver in the hammer. In all, Singapore collected one gold, three silvers and two bronzes. The other silvers came from Yvonne Danson (marathon) and Wong Yew Tong (high jump). Chan Chin Wah (pole vault) and Yvonne Danson (10,000m) won bronzes.

Jakarta 1997

Continuing what had become a tradition of sorts, James Wong won the discus yet again at the 1997 SEA Games in Jakarta. He went one better this time with gold in the hammer as well. Apart from his two golds, Singapore also won bronzes, courtesy of Toh So Liang (marathon), the men's 4x100m relay team (Yusuf Alias, Hamkah Afik, Timothy Yeo and U. K. Shyam) and the women's 4x100m relay team (Nurulaini Arifin, Mona Kunalan, Tan Shieh Li and Hiranisha Rasimudin).

Brunei 1999

The reliance on James Wong was obvious at the 1999 SEA Games in Brunei. Both our medals – gold in the discus and silver in the hammer – came from him.

Kuala Lumpur 2001

James Wong delivered yet again at the 2001 SEA Games in Kuala Lumpur where he clinched gold in the discus. Sprinter U. K. Shyam, who showed much promise in the build up to this competition, proved his worth with silver in the highly competitive 100m. Dong Enxin collected silvers in the shot put and discus to bring Singapore medal tally from track & field to 1-3-0.

Vietnam 2003

In a much-welcomed change, Singapore's track & field team didn't just depend on James Wong to deliver the gold medals at the 2003 SEA Games in Vietnam. Sure the gentle giant did his part with gold in the discus again. This time, however, he was joined by Dong Enxin (shot put), Du Xianhui (shot put) and Zhang Guirong (discus) as gold medallists. Winning silvers were Du Xianhui (discus), Zhang Guirong (javelin, shot put) and the men's 4x100m relay team of Lin Jingze, U. K. Shyam, Hamkah Afik and Poh Seng Song. In a valiant effort, Chamkaur Singh took bronze in the 1,500m.

Manila 2005

In the 2005 SEA Games in Manila, James Wong ruled in his pet event, the discus, again while Zhang Guirong and Du Xianhui won the shot put and discus respectively. Du Xianhui also won the shot put silver while bronzes went to James Wong (shot put), Zhang Guirong (discus and javelin) and the men's 4x100m relay team (Mohd Firdaus, Alfred Sim, U. K. Shyam and Poh Seng Song).

BIG STAGE

Asian Games

The transition from SEA Games success to Asian Games glory has never been straight forward as there is a big gap between the standards of these two competitions. This is because, at the Asian level, there are some world class athletes. For instance, among the Asian Games champions today are Olympic gold medallists like China's 110m hurdler Liu Xiang and Japan's hammer thrower Koji Murofushi. As such, some of Singapore's finest athletes like Chee Swee Lee and C. Kunalan can take pride in the fact that they once stood tall as among Asia's best. Here's a look at some of the best performances of Singapore's athletes at the Asian Games over the years.

New Delhi 1951

Our athletes started off on a high with one gold, two silvers and two bronzes at the very first Asian Games, held in New Delhi in 1951. Ng Liang Chiang was the toast of the team with gold in the 110m hurdles (15.2 secs) to go with bronze in the 400m hurdles (57.6 secs). Lloyd Valberg also clinched bronze with his time of 15.7 secs in the 110m hurdles. Laura Dowdswell shone with two silvers – in the 200m (27.2 secs) and 80m hurdles (13.5 secs).

Manila 1954

The competition became more intense in the 1954 Asian Games in Manila. Still, our athletes held their own, with two silvers and a bronze. The women in particular did well. Mary Klass clinched silver in the 100m (12.5 secs) while Tang Pui Wah won bronze in the 80m hurdles (12.1 secs). Chan Onn Leng continued our tradition of excellence in the hurdles with his silver in the 400m hurdles (54.8 secs).

Tokyo 1958 & Jakarta 1962

There was a dry spell for Singapore's athletes at the 1958 Asian Games in Tokyo as well as the 1962 Asian Games in Jakarta.

Bangkok 1966

Thankfully, things improved in 1966 when the competition was held in Bangkok. C. Kunalan showed tremendous potential with his silver in the 100m (10.5 secs). He also teamed up with Bava Natahar, Gunasena Migale and Ho Mun Cheong to win bronze in the 4x400m relay while Cheong Wai Hing clinched the high jump bronze.

Bangkok 1970

In the 1970 Asian Games in Bangkok, C. Kunalan continued his good form with two bronzes – 100m (10.5 secs) and 200m (21.5 secs). The best performance for Singapore came from the women's 4x100m relay team. Glory Barnabas, Wadhupal Schushila, Gan Bee Wah and Abu Bakar Maimoon Bakar combined well to win the silver in 48 secs.

Tehran 1974

In the 1974 Asian Games in Tehran, Chee Swee Lee was easily the star of the Singapore team. Running a well judged race, she clinched gold in the 400m (55.08 secs) despite stiff opposition. She was supported by team mates who also did well. For example, the women's 4x400m relay team clocked 3:43.85 to win silver while the women's 4x100m relay team managed to clinch bronze with their time of 47.10 secs. On their part, the men's 4x100m relay team of C. Kunalan, Ong Yeok Phee, Tan Say Leong and Yeo Kian Chai were rewarded with the bronze with their effort of 40.34 secs. Overall, the performance of our athletes in 1974 earned them praise. Known for their dedication and fighting spirit, they held their own against opponents from top countries like China, Japan and South Korea.

Since then, Singapore has not earned a medal in track & field at the Asian Games level (1978 Bangkok, 1982 New Delhi, 1986 Seoul, 1990 Beijing, 1994 Hiroshima, 1998 Bangkok, 2002 Busan and 2006 Doha). There were, however, valiant efforts, with some athletes coming close. Beyond the Asian Games itself, athletes like Zhang Guirong and Du Xianhui have put up fine performances in recent years. For example, at the 2005 Asian Championships in Incheon, Zhang Guirong more than held her own in the shot put against top rivals like China's Li Meiju and Li Ling.

WORLD CLASS EXPOSURE

Commonwealth Games & Olympics

At the levels of the Commonwealth Games and Olympics, Singapore's athletes have never won a medal. This is not surprising given the exceptionally high standards in these competitions. The Commonwealth Games' track & field competition boasts world class athletes from countries like Australia, Jamaica and England while the best from all over the world take part in the Olympics.

For Singapore athletes, places for these competitions have been much coveted over the years. Among those who were selected for the Commonwealth Games were 400m and 800 specialist Chee Swee Lee and sprinter C. Kunalan.

In terms of the Olympics, regarded as the pinnacle of any sporting career, a small group of Singapore athletes can take pride in being selected. Lloyd Valberg, for example, had the honour of being Singapore's first representative when he took part in the competition in 1948 in London - the very stage where the great Fanny Blankers-Koen of Holland shone with four gold medals as a 30 year-old housewife and mother of two just as the world was emerging from the shadows of the Second World War.

Tang Pui Wah made history and a statement for local women when she donned national colours at the 1952 Helsinki Olympics. There was more breakthrough for women when Janet Jesudason and Mary Klass joined Kesavan Soon and Tan Eng Yoon as our track & field representatives at the 1956 Melbourne Olympics. For the 1960 and 1964 Olympics in Rome and Tokyo respectively, Singapore didn't field anyone in athletics.

Then in 1968, C. Kunalan was selected for the Mexico Olympics. He made his "moment in the sun" count, setting a new national record of 10.38 secs in the 100m which stood for 33 years before U. K. Shyam broke it in 2001. Then Yeo Kian Chai, P. C. Suppiah and Noor Azhar Hamid took part in the 1972 Munich Olympics while Asian Games champion Chee Swee Lee made the team for the 1976 Montreal Olympics before we entered a quiet phase.

No one represented Singapore in track and field for the following Olympics - Moscow 1980, Los Angeles 1984, Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992. The dry spell was broken when long distance runner Yvonne Danson and high jumper Wong Yew Tong headed for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. There was another miss for our athletes in the 2000 Sydney Olympics before Poh Seng Song and Zhang Guirong earned the selectors' nod for the 2004 Athens Olympics.



A.A.A. Athletic Team
1947.



A.A.A. Athletics - 1948.

